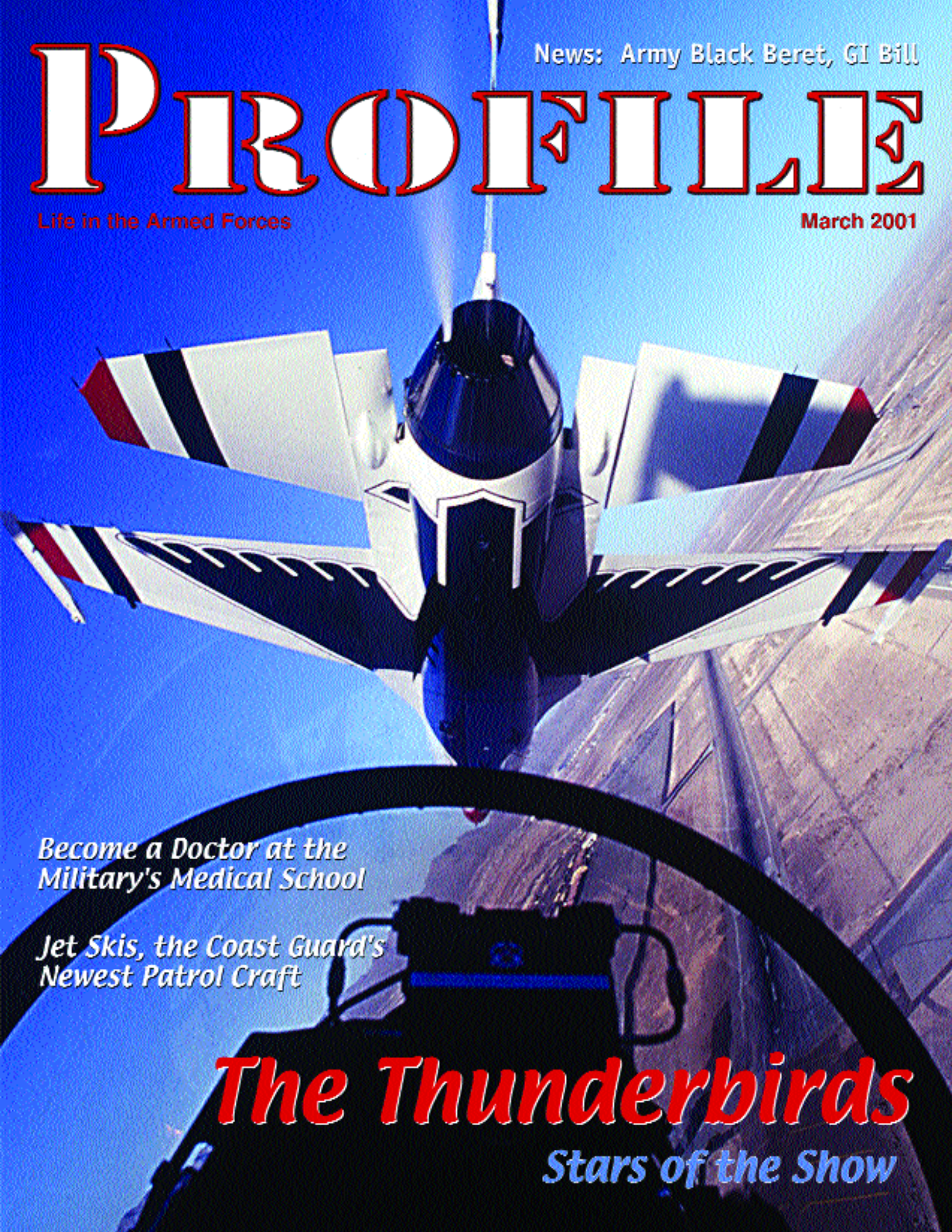
PROFILE

Life in the Armed Forces

News: Army Black Beret, GI Bill

March 2001



Become a Doctor at the Military's Medical School

Jet Skis, the Coast Guard's Newest Patrol Craft

The Thunderbirds

Stars of the Show

VOLUME 44 NUMBER 5

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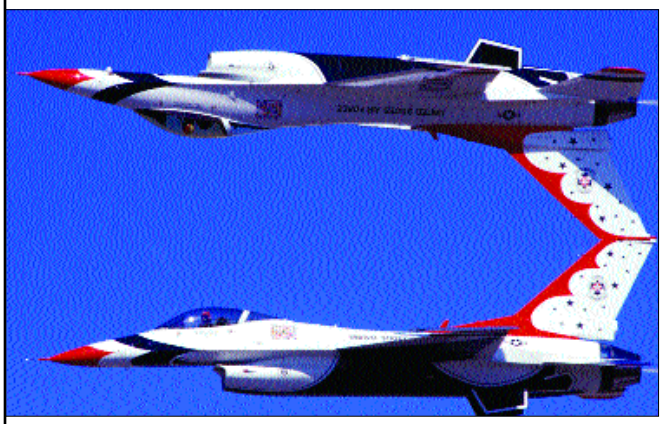
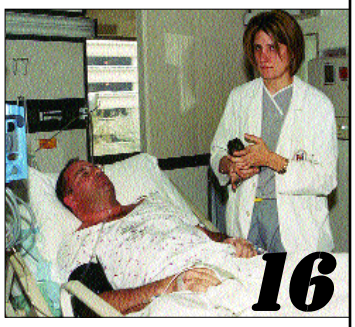


AIR TRICKS

Members of the Air Force's premiere flying demonstration team, the Thunderbirds, take flying to new heights with their precision aerial maneuvers in front of millions of spectators every year.



ON THE COVER: The U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds, perform precision aerial maneuvers demonstrating the capabilities of Air Force high-performance aircraft to people throughout the world. (U.S. Air Force photo)

PROFILE

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT...

Each month on this page we spotlight servicemembers to show our readers the diverse opportunities the military services offer.

SGT. PEDRO RISCO
U.S. ARMY

Risco, an administrative specialist stationed at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., is originally from Las Vegas, and is a graduate of El Dorado High School. Part of his job includes processing temporary duty orders for more than 500 personnel. During his military career Risco has travelled to South Korea, Thailand and Panama.

PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS VICKAYLA WILLIAMS
U.S. NAVY

Williams, a gas turbine engine mechanic stationed at Little Creek Amphibious Base in Virginia Beach, Va., is originally from Flint, Mich., and is a graduate of Flint Southwestern Academy. She said the best part of her job is getting to go to different places. Williams has travelled to St. Thomas and Puerto Rico.

SGT. HERSCHEL MIERS III
U.S. MARINE CORPS

Miers, an electronics technician stationed at the Norfolk Naval Base in Norfolk, Va., is originally from Cambridge City, Ind., and is a graduate of Lincoln High School. His job includes repairing telephone and computer systems. Miers said the best part of his job is learning a technical trade and getting a sense of accomplishment with every project. He has travelled to Hawaii.

STAFF SGT. JAMES IRWIN
U.S. AIR FORCE

Irwin, an information technology instructor stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Va., is from Chesterfield, Tenn., and is a graduate of Lexington High School. His job is to provide educational support and training in information technology and business processes to more than 10,000 customers throughout the base. Irwin said teaching is the best part of the job. He has travelled to Hawaii and Italy.

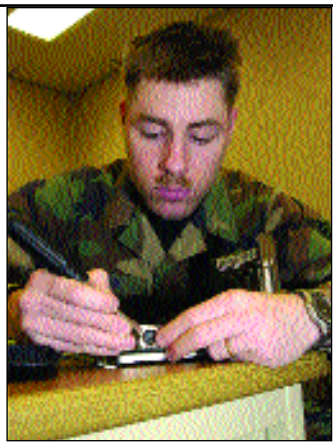


PHOTO OPS

Spc. Bryan Crumpler, the gunner, and Pfc. Adam Heunecke, the driver, prepare to take their new M1A2 into battle against the opposing force.

A Bradley Fighting Vehicle tears across the battlefield during their first engagement with the opposing force.

A soldier mans a .50 caliber machine g Abrams tank.

4th Infantry Division

Soldiers of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) participated in the largest exercise held at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif., in April. The 4th ID was testing new technology, new communications and improved weapons against NTC□s opposing force.

Training for War in the Desert

un on an M1A2

Pvt. Rene Rodriguez, the number one cannoneer on a M109A6 self-propelled howitzer, awaits orders to load an artillery round.

NEWS BYTES

ARMY

Black Beret

The Army recently announced it will be adopting the black beret for all soldiers to wear.

Effective June 14, the first Army birthday of the new millennium, the black beret will become standard wear in the Army□s active and reserve components. □It□s not about increasing recruiting; we achieved our recruiting target of 180,000 recruits last year □ without a beret,□ said Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, the Army chief of staff. □It□s not about retention; for the second year in a row, we exceeded our reenlistment goal by a wide margin □ without a beret. t□s not about morale; Soldiers are ready today to go into harm□s way. It□s about our excellence as soldiers, our unity as a force and our values as an institution.□

As a result, the 75th Ranger Regiment announced that it will exchange its traditional black beret for a tan beret to maintain the distinctiveness of the unit, Shinseki said.

New GI Bill Benefits

Participants in the Montgomery GI Bill program will be given the option starting May 1 to increase their monthly stipend up to $800.

Educational benefits legislation enacted into law in November contained a program that will allow MGIB participants the opportunity to make new contributions maximizing the total for soldiers serving on active duty three or more years to $28,800, an increase of $5,400.

This amount, combined with annual cost-of-living increases, will definitely help offset education costs for service members, said Lt. Col. George Richon, chief of Recruiting Resources Branch, Enlisted Accessions Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.

Since the MGIB program began July 1985, 89.7 percent of the soldiers it is offered to have enrolled in it, Richon said. For 2001, the figure is at 95 percent, he added.

For more information, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs at 1-888-GIBILL1 or www.gibill.va .gov/education/benefits.htm.

MARINE CORPS

Better Gear

The Marine Corps has re-evaluated what troops wear in ocean operations, leading to a new line of close-combat items coming out soon. For fully-loaded Marines who fly and fight over water, the gear is quicker to shed.

But that□s not the only thing the Corps is working on. It□s also experimenting with things that fit better and are just plain comfortable - not only useful in flights over water, but also in making duty easier for those in most other lines of work.

While some new equipment is in various stages of development, three current projects - a gas-protective mask, a parachute and full-spectrum battle equipment - are completed or nearly ready.

A new version of the gas mask features a softer rubber nose and lenses that are more scratch resistant. The MC-5 parachute has been fielded for more than five years to force-reconnaissance troops, but System Command is still considering ways to make it better. The new full-spectrum battle equipment has a new helmet, an improved flotation system, a new air supply setup and a new quick-release version of the close-quarters combat vest. The new vest for close-quarters combat features a release ring. When pulled, the ring allows the Marine to quickly drop the vest.

The gas mask, the parachute and vest are just three of the many projects the Marine Corps is working on - almost too many to count, said 1st Lt. Burrell Parmer, Systems Command spokesman.

NAVY

Navy Enhances Education

The Chief of Naval Education and Training implemented an enhanced Navywide voluntary education program, which will streamline and expand the opportunity for sailors to pursue college degrees during their Navy careers. The program will build on academic credit sailors earn for Navy training and on-the-job work experience.

"In the past, young people joined the Navy to get money to go to college after their service," former Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jay L. Johnson said. "Now, young people will join the Navy to go to college while serving their country. This is a powerful notion, and one that will benefit the sailor, the Navy and the nation. It's going to be a wonderful homerun for the Navy and we're very excited about it."

AIR FORCE

Eco-Challenge

It is 4 a.m. and Senior Airman Richard Haro gets ready to walk more than six miles to work. He pulls on a 50-pound rucksack and winds his way through Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., housing, around the flightline toward the survival school where he works.

After a day of teaching aircrews the basics of survival, evasion, resistance and escape, he runs or rides

his mountain bike home. Sometimes he does not go home because he is in the nearby forests for up to nine days at a time showing trainees how to avoid capture, eat off the land and find their way to rescue.

It is a grueling routine he has kept up for the past two months, but one that is getting him ready for a 250-mile race through the Alaskan wilderness. His four-person, mixed gender squad will compete against 26 teams in the first Armed Forces Eco-Challenge, where the winners earn a spot in the annual international October Eco-Challenge in New Zealand.

A total of 32 Air Force members comprise almost half of the competitors. They will be joining 52 soldiers, sailors and Marines who will line up at midnight June 21 in a location being kept secret until 24 hours prior to race start. During a time when Alaska has 24 hours of daylight, teams must canoe icy waters; bike over mountain passes; climb and rappel past nature's obstacles; and literally run their way through the course, stopping only an hour or two to sleep. With only a compass and maps provided by race officials, teams will traverse the terrain carrying everything they need. The time limit for finishing the race is six days, but Haro said his team is training to do it in 4 1/2 days meaning they will have to cover more than 63 miles a day.

"We feel pretty confident in our abilities because most of the required skills are things we've learned while performing our job as survival instructors," he said. "Most of us are expert navigators and are proficient with using terrain, contour, celestial and night navigation techniques. We're skilled in glacier hiking and a couple of us have scaled Mount Rainier (in Washington). We know how to use the ropes and canoes. What we don't have certification on, such as ice climbing, we are getting through the base Outdoor Adventure Program staff."

Another challenge teams face is raising money. The entry fee alone is $4,000 per team. Add gear and travel costs, and it is easy to see why team members also spend their off-duty time asking friends and businesses for assistance with funds and gear. This race will be filmed and aired at a later date on the Discovery Channel, and the winning team will be featured as Team TAPS in the New Zealand race.

COAST GUARD

Commissioning Program

The College Student Pre-Commissioning Initiative program is available to all students attending historic black colleges and universities, member schools of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and other approved institutions of higher learning.

When students apply for the program, they will compete in a national competition during their sophomore year. If selected, they will enlist in the Coast Guard while in school. Students will attend eight weeks of military training during the summer, which will provide them with the basic knowledge of Coast Guard missions and responsibilities. Upon completion of their degree, they will attend Officer Candidate School, which is 17 weeks of focused officer training in New London, Conn.

In addition to receiving full tuition and books, they will get a salary and benefits. This includes free medical and dental care while on active duty. They will also receive 30 days paid vacation a year, as well as an opportunity to qualify for post-graduate tuition assistance.

Stars of the show

The Thunderbirds

By Master Sgt. Scott P. Clough, USAF

As the four red, white and blue F-16 Fighting Falcon jets arc through the sky trailing white smoke, wing tip to wing tip, thousands of people look upward in awe at the precision flying. As they gaze at the four-ship formation, little do they know a surprise is coming from the back of the crowd at high speed – almost at the speed of sound. Suddenly, two more of the sleek jets appear at low-level, lighting their afterburners directly over the crowd. Before the startled crowd even realizes what happened, the jets scream off into the distant sky.

This was one of many carefully timed maneuvers performed by the Thunderbirds, the U.S. Air Force Aerial Demonstration Squadron, in front of millions of people every year. Precision means everything to them in their daily performance, but not just for the pilots. It also takes precision on the part of the support people behind the scenes. No detail is too small, from ensuring the aircraft are spotless to the sharp salutes rendered to the pilots during the ground portion of the show.

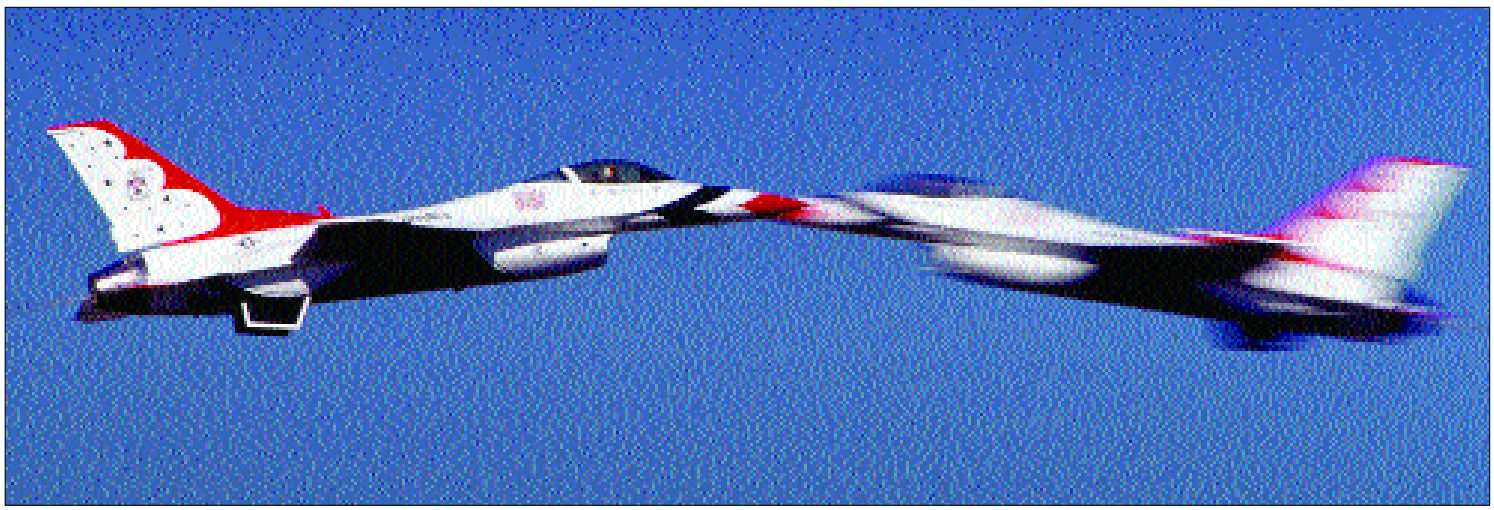
In fact, the Thunderbirds consider the enlisted support to be so critical that each new member goes through a 21-day training program to learn each person's function and how he or she contributes to the team. They also learn the squadron's history and daily operations, and brush up on their communication skills. At the end of this period, they are tested on their knowledge and must score 80 percent or higher before receiving the Thunderbird patch.

More than 100 of the 120 people assigned to the Thunderbirds are enlisted members, serving in more than 27 career fields. All have been in the Air Force at least three years before coming to Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., where their skills are integrated into the Thunderbird team.

"Our job is to demonstrate the professional qualities the Air Force develops in the people who fly, maintain and support the aircraft," said Lt. Col. John Venable, the team's commander and a Marietta, Ga., native. "We are a mirror image of every other front-line fighter unit in the Air Force. Every member of the team is critical to the success of the mission."

The team is made up of eight pilots, four support officers, four civilians and the enlisted members. Between March and November, the Thunderbirds average nearly 70 demonstrations, keeping them on the road more than 200 days.

"Because of military budget cuts and downsizing, a perception exists that the Air Force is out of the hiring business. Quite the contrary. That is why the Thunderbirds are here. Our red, white and blue jets are a vivid reminder to young people that the Air Force is still hiring," said Venable, who earned his commission through



Two solo pilots from the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration team cross at show center with the head-on pass. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Gruenwald)

Capt. Guy E. Hunneyman, public affairs officer for the Thunderbirds, visits with Donnie Owings, 12, after a special performace by the Thunderbirds recently. Owings was one of a number of critically ill children who attended the performance. (Photo by Senior Airman Greg L. Davis)

the Ohio University ROTC program. "We need more than 30,000 new recruits this year alone."

Pilots

The demonstration pilots, flying as a single unit, demonstrate the skills and techniques demanded of every Air Force fighter pilot. This ranges from basic loops, rolls and formation flying taught in initial flight training, to the more advanced air combat tactics.

To become proficient and ensure a safe demonstration season, the pilots fly hundreds of practice demonstrations over the Indian Springs Auxiliary Air Field range in Nevada from mid-November to mid-March.

"We fly more than 100 missions per pilot before the show season ever begins - this is in addition to the hundreds of hours spent in ground preparation," said Maj. Scott Bowen, who calls Kingsport, Tenn., home. Bowen earned his commission from the Clemson University ROTC program. In his second year on the team, he added, "We use a building block approach following a strict syllabus, flying lower and in tighter formations in preparation for the show season."

"Safety is paramount and key to planning the demonstration maneuvers" said Maj. Mike Byrne, the team's operations officer, a native of Fostoria, Ohio, who earned his commission through the Bowling Green State University ROTC program.

In addition to showing the public the skill of Air Force pilots, the demonstrations also exhibit the capabilities of one of the United States' most modern and combat proven fighter aircraft – the F-16C – first flown by the team in 1982. Among its capabilities is the ability to fly fast and turn tight. Maj. Dean Wright, a solo pilot on the team who is originally from Sheridan, Ark., demonstrates both when he flies.

"The F-16 is the best aircraft to show the crowd what our Air Force is all about, " said Wright, who got his commission from the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. "As solo pilots we demonstrate everything from the slow-speed handling of the aircraft to its maneuverability and agility.

"I get to push the F-16 to its limits," Wright said. "From flying at minimum airspeed to performing a 360 degree high G-force turn at 600 miles per hour, the solo demonstrates the superb maneuvering capabilities of the F-16."

The Thunderbird diamond formation, flying an average distance of 18 inches to three feet apart, represents the skill and training of every U.S. Air Force pilot.

"Because of the aircrafts' proximity to each other, there's little margin for error," explained Capt. Rick Boutwell, originally from Greensville, Ala., and a graduate of the Troy State University ROTC program. "With my canopy 18 inches below the bosses wingtip, I have to have tremendous confidence that he won't flinch during a maneuver."

Maintenance

While the pilots spend a lot of time in the public spotlight, there are also more than 60 aircraft maintainers who ensure the Thunderbirds' fleet of 12 F-16s are mission capable and the pilots strap themselves into a safe and reliable aircraft. Without their dedication, attention to detail and long hours of preparing for the performance, the demonstration would not be possible, said Venable.

Twenty-two of the maintainers are assigned as dedicated or assistant crew chiefs. Each aircraft the team maintains has a dedicated and an assistant crew chief responsible for all servicing and scheduled maintenance.

"Our pilots and crew chiefs work closely together throughout the year," explained Advance Crew Chief Staff Sgt. Scott Hooks from Norfolk, Va. "It's a direct reflection of the pride and professionalism that exists in every Air Force unit."

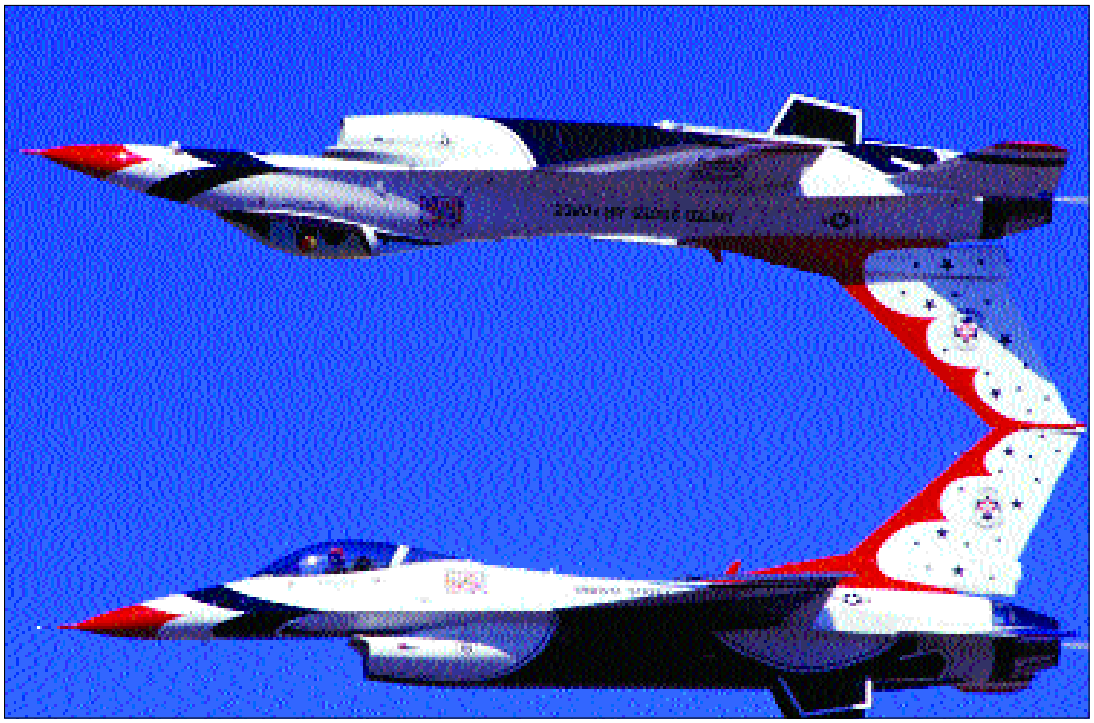
"Our responsibilities range from servicing the aircraft with fuel, to inspections and part changes," said Tech. Sgt. Sean Carraway, originally from Salt Lake City and crew chief for the commander's jet. "If there is a problem with our aircraft, it is our responsibility to ensure it is documented and fixed quickly and correctly."

But crew chiefs can't perform all of the maintenance themselves. Some of the aircraft's many complex, sensitive systems require specialized care. That's where

maintainers in other specialties such as avionics, electrical and environmental, egress, structural, and fuels come into play.

"The F-16 is a 'fly-by-wire' aircraft, which means computers and electrical wires are used to fly the jet," said Staff Sgt. Troy Blanchard, an avionics specialist from Grand Island, Neb. "We need to be familiar with what others do on the aircraft because when a problem occurs it helps us troubleshoot and resolve things quickly."

To maintain what is sometimes referred to as the "electric jet", with almost 11 miles of wire running through its fuselage, it takes skilled electricians. These electricians also ensure the aircraft's environmental systems work properly.



U.S. Air Force Air Demo team pilot Maj. Dean Wright is inverted as the two solos perform the signature "Calypso" pass. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Gruenwald)

"We maintain all of the electrical systems on the aircraft," said Tech. Sgt. Steven Loy, an electrical and environmental specialist from Apple Valley, Calif. "We're also responsible for environmental systems such as cabin pressure, oxygen, air conditioning and the aircraft's anti-skid braking system."

Another system on the aircraft critical to the pilots is the ejection seat. To take care of this, egress technicians are on hand to ensure the F-16s ejection seats and canopies are safe and will operate if a pilot experiences a problem and needs to eject from his aircraft.

"Our job includes everything from inspecting the seats to arming all explosives in the seat and canopy," said Staff Sgt. Cameron St. Amand from Derry, N.H. "Everything must work the first time. If it doesn't, it could cost a pilot his life."

Another part of the maintenance team includes the structural specialists, who maintain the integrity of the airframes and ensure the world-famous paint scheme on each aircraft stays in top-notch condition.

"It takes close to a month for us to put the Thunderbird paint scheme on an aircraft," said Staff Sgt. Neal Barton from Oates, Mo. He said most of this work is done at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., the team's home. "We also stencil each aircraft and paint the team's support equipment."

Rounding out the various areas of maintenance are the fuels specialists, who take care of the aircraft's fuel and emergency power needs.

"If an aircraft loses an engine, or the pilot loses power, we have an emergency power unit that kicks in and restores electricity and hydraulics so the aircraft can be landed safely," said Staff Sgt. Phil Groenwald, a fuels specialist from St. Paul, Minn. "We're responsible for providing hydrazine to fuel the EPU. It's a hazardous substance that requires special handling. We correct fuel imbalances and replace all sensors and lines when needed."

At the end of each season 22 crew chiefs and specialists who show they have the initiative and drive to keep the team's F-16s mission ready are selected to go on the road for the next show year. Led by a senior enlisted aircraft maintainer, the show team travels with the aircraft the entire year.

With a talented ground support team and thrilling aerial maneuvers, the Thunderbirds demonstrate the full spectrum of Air Force professionals.

"Our air demonstrations are a mirror image of the everyday Air Force," Venable said. "We do what every Air Force fighter pilot is doing around the world, whether it be monitoring no-fly zones over Iraq and Bosnia or ensuring peace over Korea."

Last year, the team performed more than 60 demonstrations in 25 states and Canada. They also returned to Europe for the first time since 1996. The team's first performance was June 8, 1953 at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. Since then, the Thunderbirds have flown before more than 310 million people at more than 3,500 air demonstrations in all 50 states and 59 foreign countries.

(Left) This is a view from the cockpit as the Thunderbird "Diamond Formation" completes a loop maneuver during a pre-season practice over the Nevada desert. The team's home is located at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., just outside Las Vegas.(Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Gruenwald)
(Above) Even on their way to the next show, the Thunderbirds maintain their formation. The show season, which runs from March through November, keeps the team away from home to locations throughout the United States and overseas. (U.S. Air Force photo)

2001 Thunderbirds Schedule

The U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds, is scheduled to perform more than 25 more shows in 29 states and will visit the Pacific for the first time since 1994. The remaining 2001 schedule is:

June
2-3 NAS Fallon, Nev.
9 Hill AFB, Utah
10 Cannon AFB, N.M.
16-17 McChord AFB, Wash.
23-24 Tullahoma, Tenn.
30 Scott AFB, Ill.

July
1 Niagara Falls, N.Y.
4 Battle Creek, Mich.
7-8 Pope AFB, N.C.
14 Columbus AFB, Miss.
15 San Angelo, Texas
21-22 Dayton, Ohio
25 Cheyenne, Wy.
28-29 Latrobe, Pa.

August
4-5 Otis ANG Base, Mass.
11 Minot AFB, N.D.
12 Ellsworth AFB, S.D.
18-19 Chicago
25-26 Mid-season break

September
1-3 Bay St. Louis, Mo.
8 Muskogee, Okla
9 Sioux City, Iowa
15-16 Salinas, Calif.
Pacific Tour
20 Sept. through 28 Oct.
(Specific locations to be announced)

November
3 Seymour-Johnson AFB, N.C.
4 Moody AFB, Ga.
10-11 Daytona Beach, Fla.

For more information, go to www.airforce.com/thunderbirds.

Visiting Paradise

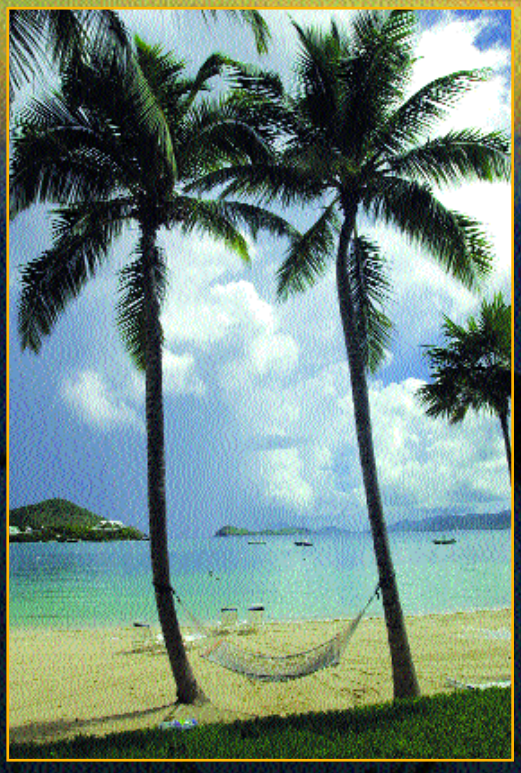
As the USS Oscar Austin pulls into the harbor at Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, one thing is immediately clear - this is not your average liberty port.

The sun shines down on crystal surf as strains of calypso music drift across the water, children laugh and frolic close to shore and shoppers bustle amid the busy bluestone shops clustered around the waterfront. Welcome to the islands, "mon."

The island of St.Thomas includes some of the most incredible stretches of coast on earth. This tiny addition to the stars and stripes was a well-earned respite for sailors of USS Oscar Austin after their long underway period.

This laid-back, tropical oasis has a slightly shady past involving the exploits of pirates. You'd think the stomping ground of Blackbeard and the mythical Bluebeard would be the last place to find a beach party, but a fine port is a fine port whether you're unloading plundered booty or looking for a little rest and relaxation.

St.Thomas is strikingly beautiful, thanks to a spine of hills whose green ridges form headlands separating bays and coves filled with turquoise-blue water; each has it's



For sailors looking for a quiet spot to spend a lazy afternoon, St. Thomas is the place to be.

Story and photos by Petty Officer 2nd Class Bob Houlihan

own distinct character and feeling.

Charlotte Amalie, the capital of the Virgin Islands, is a busy port, and she wears her Old World heritage with style. Sailors walking past the neat, pastel-painted warehouses and the dual Danish-English street signs have no doubt that this isn't an American shopping mall.

After long weeks at sea, what better way to relax than basking in the sun on some of the best white-sand beaches in the Caribbean? Magens Bay, probably the best beach on the island, is a large sliver of bright sand and vibrant palm trees that shows up on lists of the top 10 beaches of the world.

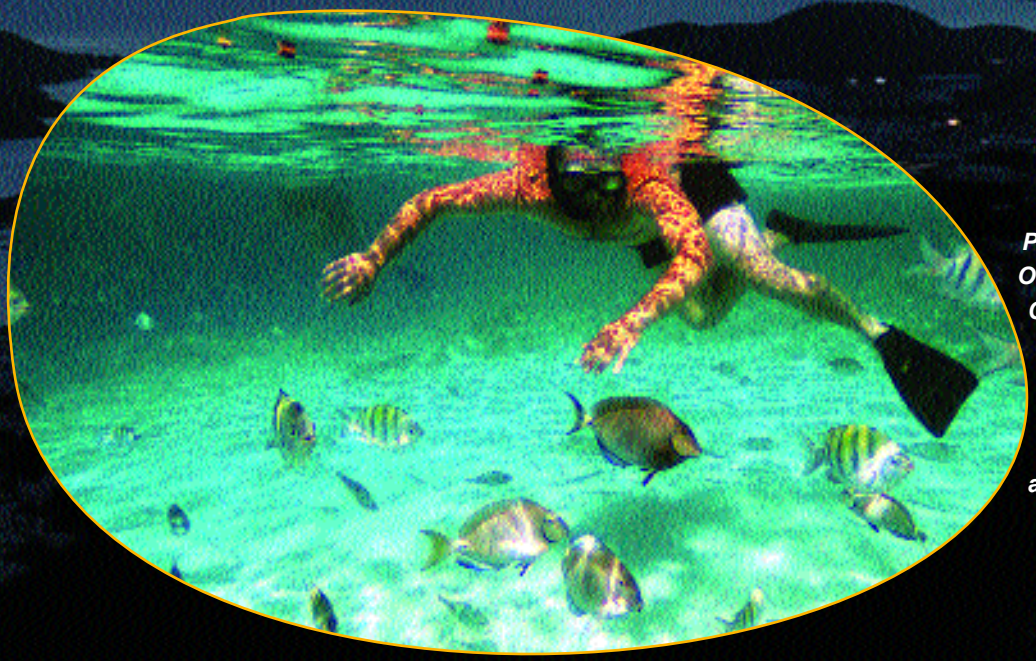
"This place is absolutely beautiful, it's really our first good liberty port," said Petty Officer 1st Class Ginamarie Doherty. "I got to do some shopping for souvenirs for my husband and son and went on a Tiki raft ride."

The earliest settlers in the Virgin Islands were the Indian tribes of the Ciboneys, the Arawaks and the Caribs. Columbus arrived in 1493, and maybe feeling the lack of female company shipboard, called the islands Las V'rgenes.

The United States first recognized the strategic importance of the islands' fortresses and deep-water harbors during the American Civil War. At the outbreak of World War I, these islands became critical to control the Caribbean basin and the Panama Canal, so the United States purchased them from Denmark for $25 million in gold, the highest price ever paid for a U.S. territory until that time.

Today $25 million wouldn't even buy you the smallest of the many beautiful beachfront hotels on St. Thomas, much less the island itself, but a few hours spent scouring the many markets is sure to bring a bargain-hunting sailor some personal treasures.

After a few days spent lounging beneath swaying palms and swimming through these transparent waters, the Sailors of Oscar Austin had no doubt as to why St. Thomas is known as "America's Paradise."



Petty Officer 3rd Class David Bartley gets up close and personal with the fish while snorkeling at Coki Beach.

Lone riders

Story and photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Chris Grooms

Their engines roaring, two twin-seat personal watercraft dart between waves and leap over the swells of Lake Michigan, with red, white and blue blurs of the Coast Guard stripes marking the hulls of the machines. Straddling the sleek watercraft are Petty Officer 3rd Class Chris Rutt and Seaman Dan Falcioni of Station Michigan City, Ind., practicing the skills they learned to become qualified personal watercraft operators in a new 9th District program.

Chief Warrant Officer George Spanier, Coast Guard Auxiliary coordinator for Group Detroit, created the Auxiliary PWC Patrol Program, which was expanded this summer to include active-duty Coast Guard throughout the district. Its goals are to increase safe operation of PWCs and to increase Coast Guard visibility. Fifteen Coast Guard Auxiliary and active-duty personnel are now using the watercraft at Station Michigan City, Station St. Clair Shores, Mich., Station Belle Isle, Mich., and Station Port Huron, Mich.

"Most of our patrols are conducted during events such as air shows and other major marine events where there's very little room to maneuver.

Al Botamer

To operate a PWC in the program, each person must be boatcrew qualified and pass the navigation rules test. Upon completion of classroom instruction, they are given the chance to prove their ability on the water.

"We set up obstacle courses with weighted buoys for the riders to maneuver through and around," said Al Botamer, assistant division staff officer for the 9th Easter Region Auxiliary District. "As the riders improve, we decrease the distance between buoys - testing their balance and control," said Botamer. "We make sure that before we put them out on patrol, they have all the tools and abilities to stand as an example for safe and responsible PWC operation."

Although personal watercraft are known for their speed and wave-jumping capabilities, there are other demanding skills the riders must learn.

"We have to be able to operate at very slow speeds in very tight spaces with extreme boating traffic," said Botamer. "Most of our patrols are conducted during events such as air

Petty Officer 3rd Class Chris Rutt from Coast Guard Station Michigan City is one of the first active duty Coast Guardsmen in the 9th District to experience the use of personal watercraft on routine patrols.

shows and major marine events where there's very little room to maneuver."

Since their introduction, PWCs have been a controversial topic among boaters - many complain they are loud and unsafe. PWC riders have been known to operate extremely close to other craft, creating dangerous situations that often lead to injury or death.

"Our goal is to educate the public. That's the bottom line."

Don Pryjmak

Coast Guard use of PWCs provides a platform from which to educate boaters about PWC safety.

"We need to talk to the PWC public on their level to set an example of proper operation," Spanier said. "We now have more credibility with them, and we can reach a sector of the boating public we could not previously identify with."

Although PWCs cannot replace boats in the role of search and rescue, they have proven their value in preventing boating accidents.

"We are much more approachable when we're on personal watercraft. People on personal watercraft, canoes and kayaks come up to us with questions all the time," said Botamer.

The program is also a great recruiting tool for the Coast Guard.

"Young folks love it. It has proved to be very popular with the public," Spanier said. "It interests people to ask questions about the Coast Guard and boating safety."

Other advantages of using PWCs are the ease of transport, the ability to be launched and recovered from just about anywhere, and the fact that fuel cost and repair are relatively inexpensive compared to that of rescue boats.

"We can respond to a situation that a big boat could not because of the boat traffic. It's easier for us to avoid anchor lines and get into more shallow water than it is for our rescue boats," said Don Pryjmak, assistant division staff officer for the 9th Central Region Auxiliary District. "We can cover a lot of ground very quickly."

Seaman Dan Falcioni practices his new riding skills at Coast Guard Station Michigan City, Ind.

"We can stop someone very easily and give them boating safety advice," said Pryjmak. "If we notice a violation, such as an operator not wearing a lifejacket or operating at excessive speeds, we can stop them and correct the problem.

"Our goal is to educate the public. That's the bottom line," said Pryjmak. "Knowledge is the key to safety on the water."

www.gocoastguard.com
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(Right) Seaman Dan Falcioni is one of the first Coast Guardsmen in the 9th District to participate in the personal watercraft program.

Medical school: no tuition, plus pay and benefits while attending

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SGT. RAMONA E. JOYCE, USA

Most people would say an education itself is money in the bank. But when you don't have money in the bank to begin with, you need to turn to scholarships, financial aid or debilitating student loans.

Imagine getting through four years of undergraduate school and being knee-deep in debt starting out in an entry-level salary position. All of a sudden the dream of going on to medical school doesn't seem very attainable or affordable after all.

Well, consider applying to medical school at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., just minutes from Washington, D.C.

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and the F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine were established by Congress in 1972 to train health care professionals for the Department of Defense and the U.S. Public Health Service, according to Dr. Val Hemming, dean of the F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine and a 30-year veteran of the Air Force.

It's free

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is a tuition-free institution. In addition, books and instruments are furnished to students either without charge or on a loan basis.

While enrolled in the School of Medicine, students serve on active duty as reserve commissioned officers in the grade of 0-1, which is a second lieutenant in the Army and Air Force, or an ensign in the Navy.

Once accepted to the tuition-free medical program, students are also paid a full-time salary while attending.

That means no worries about trying to hold down two part-time jobs while simultaneously finding time to cram for exams, or wondering if you can afford to eat anything other than macaroni and cheese so you can pay the rent.

Consider this. Tuition for one year of medical school at nearby Georgetown University, a private school in Washington, D.C., is approximately $35,000, give or take a few pencils and books. Plus, living in Georgetown, an affluent area in the District of Columbia, can get a bit pricey.

"Living in Georgetown could easily exceed $50,000 a year," Hemming said. "A lot of students are mortgaging their lives."

With that scenario, a medical school graduate will head into his internship and residency with $140,000 of debt to repay. And, that doesn't even include his living expenses for four years, or the student loans from his undergraduate degree prior to attending medical school.

While state university medical school programs are less expensive than private institutions, they still can have a steep price tag after all is said and done.

Hemming said medical school tuition at state universities ranges from $10,000 to $20,000 a year, again, not including living expenses that can run up an additional $15,000 to $30,000 a year depending on location.

More benefits

Besides free tuition at USUHS, students receive a number of other benefits, too.

One of the biggest is a paycheck. While medical students at traditional universities often have to hold down part-time jobs to pay the bills, the military pays students a monthly base pay, plus monthly housing and

The of university□s main campus is located minutes outside the nation□s capital.

food allowances.

Because students at USUHS are in the military, they receive a monthly paycheck of $1,997.70. This increases each year with longevity and annual pay raises.

At graduation, the military's newest physicians are promoted to the rank of captain and will bring home a monthly salary of $3,489.30.

Another substantial monetary benefit is the Basic Allowance for Housing. BAH is a monthly housing stipend for servicemembers to pay for off-base housing, either their rent or mortgage. The rates are calculated by the cost-of-living index where students are assigned, and the servicemember's rank.

Students live around the Washington, D.C., metro area, which also includes suburbs in Maryland and Virginia. The current housing allowance rate for married medical school students is $1,052 and $880 for single students.

The Basic Allowance for Subsistence is another monthly cash benefit, currently is $160.42 for all officers.

Both BAH and BAS are non taxable – another bonus of military service.

A married first-year medical student will bring home more than $3,200 a month, or approximately $38,500 a year for attending school. By graduation, a new doctor will be making more than $5,200 a month, $62,600 annually, after promotion, BAH increases and the BAS allowance.

As active duty officers, students are eligible for a wide range of other benefits, too. They receive 30 days of paid vacation each year, free medical and dental treatment, low-cost life insurance, and commissary (military supermarket) and exchange (military department store) privileges where costs are considerably lower than their civilian counterparts.

In exchange for free tuition, pay and other benefits, officers awarded the doctor of medicine degree are required by law to serve on active duty for seven years. Time spent in graduate medical school such as an internship or residency does not count toward the payback.

Military medicine

"The U.S. has been at war off and on for more than 200 years," Hemmings noted. "From the beginning there have been people there to help soldiers."

"It's a full time job being a medical student. Here, students have no other job than school."

Dr. Val Hemming

He explained that civilian health practitioners were often "borrowed" to take care of troops.

"Civilian practitioners were not used to handling the type of situations [common to war], such as trauma, that occurs in combat," Hemming said. "When you take troops to the field or in an aircraft at 30,000 feet, military physicians need to know the physiology of the situation."

During the Vietnam War era someone realized there wasn't an institution around for this type of unique training. And thus, USUHS was conceived and the F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine was born.

In addition to the regular medical school curriculum, the school of medicine's primary objective is to produce dedicated medical officers.

Consequently, leadership, military training and military medical programs are integral parts of the curriculum.

"We're the only medical school who has a Department of Military Medicine," Hemming explained. "This is what distinguishes our medical school from the other 128 medical schools in the country."

Four years, plus

During the first year of medical school all semesters include medical history.

Courses like military studies covers an overview of the scope of military medicine, introducing military medical systems and the aspects of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare, non-battle injury and combat injury, among others. Students receive training in other areas, including combat survival skills, basic field medical skills and small unit leadership while deployed during one week of Field Training Exercise Kerkesner at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. Immediately following the exercise, students spend four weeks with an operational unit of their parent service to enrich their understanding of the people and working environment for which they will have future medical responsibility.

Other military oriented courses include military contingency medicine, which covers a variety of topics such as triage, disaster medicine, battle fatigue and medical unit leadership.

"We teach all the standard disciplines and we weave military medicine into all of that," Hemming explained. "As military medical officers, their first job is to keep servicemembers healthy, then to fix them. It's called force protection."

Hemming said the core curriculum includes anatomy, physiology, pathology, pharmacology, microbiology, bio-statistics, public health and preventive medicine.

Specialties include medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, psychology, neurology, anesthesiology and pain management, and family practice.

"We really do prepare them for a career in military medicine" Hemming said. "They get unique training they can get nowhere else."

Plus, Hemming added, "they will not incur the kind of personal debt associated with going to medical school.

"It's a full-time job being a medical

student," he explained. "Here, students have no other job other than school."

At USUHS the faculty and staff are committed to seeing each student succeed.

"We intend to graduate everyone we take," the dean said. "We screen very, very carefully and expect students to succeed. Since our first class in 1976, we've graduated 97 percent of our students.

"We made a solid commitment. If they do their part, we'll do ours," Hemming said. "I think there's wonderful morale here. It's a pleasure [for students] to be here despite the hard work."

Hemming can back that up, too.

"We have the highest satisfaction rate of any medical school in the country – 83 percent compared to an average of 37 percent," he said.

What's medical school like?

The first couple of years of medical school are classroom-oriented.

"The first two years we teach students the language of medicine. We teach them the culture of medicine and how humans behave when they get sick, and how to respond, how to listen," Hemming explained. "We teach clinical problem solving, and physical diagnosis where students learn the difference between what's normal and not normal."

The third and fourth years of medical school put students in applied settings.

"Students become apprentices in inpatient and outpatient settings," Hemming said.

Students take 12 weeks of medicine studying disease, then 12 weeks of surgery learning how to put things together and 6 weeks of pediatrics, and so on.

"Students spend 11 months of their third year working in hospitals with medical teams," Hemming said.

Fourth year students perform clerkships working in different specialties completing five, two-month rotations.

After medical school, students become interns. After their year-long internship, doctors can start their residency to become board certified in a specialty that interests them.

For example, to become a family practitioner a student completes four years of medical school, a one-year internship and three years of residency training.

For people who like to travel, USUHS offers students another unique opportunity.

Third and fourth year students get to do six-week rotations of training at different military medical centers.

Some locations include Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, Naval Medical Center in San Diego and Wilford Hall U.S. Air Force Hospital in San Antonio, Texas.

A student's point of view

Medical students at the university study anatomy in the laboratory.

2nd Lt. Michelle Moyer, a medical student at UHUHS, confers with Navy Lt. (Dr.) David Allen about a patient.

Michelle Moyer hails from Metuchen, N.J. She is a second lieutenant in the Army and in her fourth year of medical school at USUHS. The 26-year-old is a graduate of Metuchen High School and received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Drew University in Madison, N.J.

Moyer said she'd never heard of USUHS until she started doing some research on medical schools.

"My mom's a nurse. I always wanted to do psychology when I was in college, but I got more interested in the clinical side.

"I had no military experience at all," Moyer explained. "I found out about USUHS through one of the medical school reference books you can buy in the store. USUHS was ranked pretty well."

What clinched it for Moyer was going to the interview.

"When I went to the interview day, I was very impressed," she said. "They were well organized. I like the faculty, plus the money.

"I looked at it as a full-time job since I was getting a salary. I didn't want to initiate a lot of school loans," Moyer figured. "Plus, you get the feeling you'll be doing a lot of good for other people by serving in the military."

2nd Lt. Michelle Moyer checks on a patient in the intensive care unit at Walter Reed Army Medical Center during one of her rotations as a medical student.

Another thing Moyer pointed out was after medical school, residents in the civilian sector get paid, but not that much, and they still have student loans to pay back.

"When we're residents, we get 0-3 or a captain's salary," she said.

Moyer said the quality of the education was also important.

"It's a great school," she exclaimed, "so you get an awesome education. The environment here is very helpful versus very competitive. There's not a cutthroat atmosphere here at all."

Sometimes at other schools the competitiveness takes the front seat, she said, which can get in the way of doing a good job instead of worrying about being number one.

"Here, students help each other out academically," she said. "We know we're going to be working with each other for years to come."

The school staff and faculty are very supportive of the students, too, Moyer added.

"They'll help with career counseling, personal issues, family issues, they're just very flexible," Moyer explained. "Academically they keep a close eye on students so they can identify anyone who might need a little extra help to pass.

When comparing USUHS with other medical schools and hospitals, Moyer said the patient care they each give is the same quality.

"What we learn in a military hospital isn't different from other hospitals," she said.

The differences are in the additional military emphasis USUHS students receive that others don't.

"We take five months more of classes [throughout the four years of medical school] than traditional schools, geared toward military medicine. We go on field exercises where we go through wartime scenarios where we have to set up first-aid stations and field hospitals. We have to treat simulated wartime casualties, where real soldiers role-play different injuries," Moyer explained. "The purpose is to have us practice medicine in a more austere environment."

Moyer's current rotation has her at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., the Army's flagship medical center only a few miles from the USUHS main campus. There, she works with physicians and residents while conducting some hands-on patient care.

"I'm currently working in the medical intensive care unit for four weeks," Moyer said. "We follow a patient or two and follow everything about them – what medications they're on, vital signs, we order tests perhaps. I'll also learn some procedures."

Moyer has already completed three hospital rotations.

"I did a six-week rotation at Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, plus four weeks of orthopedic surgery there, too. And, I worked at the Naval hospital in Pensacola, Fla., doing a family practice rotation."

Moyer said her fourth year has been particularly rewarding because she's been able to sample the different fields of medicine.

"Third year rotations are mandatory," she explained. "In our fourth year, we set some of our own rotations up, which gives us an idea of which specialty we want to apply for residency."

Moyer is almost at the finish line of her dream. In a couple of months, she will be joining the military work force as a doctor.

Besides the "amazing education," Moyer said the different military experiences have been great.

"I've learned things about myself, and have more confidence, and I've met a lot of great people and made great connections with them."

She said the best thing about her experience at USUHS has to be hearing "thank you."

"As a student you don't have a lot of responsibility with patients yet, but when that one patient really appreciated your help or thanks you for seeing them everyday, it's a great experience," she said with a grin. "It makes you feel good when you can do something like that."

Now that's money in the bank.

For more information about the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, or how to apply go to www.USUHS.mil, call toll free 1-800-772-1743, or send admissions inquires to: Admissions Office, F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine, 4301 Jones Bridge Road, Room A1041, Bethesda, MD 20814-4799.

Tuzla's turnaround

Story by Master Sgt. Louis A. Arana-Barradas, USAF, photos by Master Sgt. Keith Reed, USAF

The compound at Tuzla Air Base in Bosnia-Herzegovina – dubbed "Rock City" for the crushed rocks that cover most of its grounds – is as homey as any front-line location can be. It even boasts a café with an ice cream parlor -- a far cry from the muddy nightmare it was five years ago when the United States first brought peacekeeping troops into this war-torn European country in support of a United Nations operation.

Security remains tight. Flak vests are still in vogue. But the way of life at this base is a lot better than it used to be.

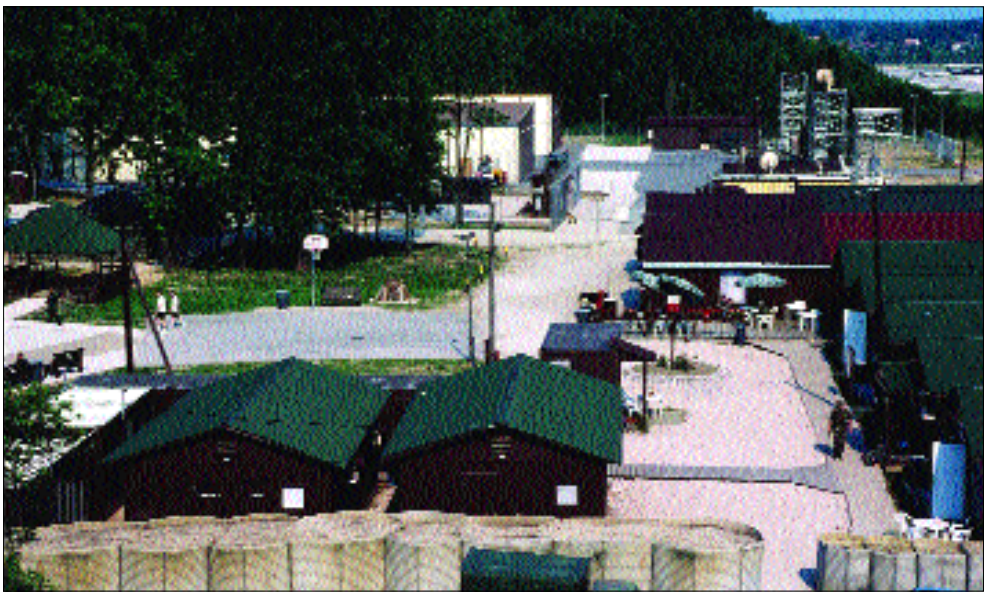
Two huge dining facilities cater to any taste. Now there's an exchange with everything from combat boots to Gummi Bears. There are places to get your pizza, burger or ice cream fix. You can sip a cappuccino at a sidewalk café or order a car.

On the main part of the post, Camp Eagle, are the soldiers. Job one for them is still peacekeeping. On the air base side, airmen run flight operations. They also fly the unmanned Predator reconnaissance drones. Its real-time pictures are worth a "thousand words" to peacekeepers.

Each rotation of troops has it better than the ones they replaced. So a Tuzla tour can be a good thing, said Senior Airman Tami Hazeltine, a weather forecaster. When she got there, what she found surprised her.

"It's so much nicer than I thought. Facilities are great," she said. "And it's a getaway from the hustle and bustle of Fort Campbell (Ky.). There's sure a lot less stress here."

Tuzla was once a small MiG fighter-training base, a backwoods Cold War relic with some U.N. troops. But the strife in Bosnia-Herzegovina, part of what used to be Yugoslavia, changed that. When opposing factions fought each other, the turmoil threatened stability in Europe. The United Nations asked for peace. And, with the U.S.-brokered Dayton Peace Accords, the sides agreed to try. But the United Nations ordered 60,000 NATO-led troops into the country to ensure they would.



The compound at Tuzla Air Base in Bosnia-Herzegovina is called "Rock City."

That started Joint Endeavor. But getting troops there would require a huge airlift. At that time, Tuzla's 8,100-foot runway was the country's best. The Air Force flew in and set up to run air operations. Then it started to move the 25-nation peacekeeping force and the mountain of supplies and equipment to maintain them.

Soon there were troops, humvees, tanks and armored vehicles squeezed into every space cleared of landmines. The airlift went on for several months during which airmen handled an average of 40 cargo planes a day.

Then the action died. Airmen still ran air operations, but their workload dropped to some seven cargo planes a day. Today, under Operation Joint Forge, their mission is resupplying the peacekeeping force, said Col. William Schell, a former commander of the 401st Air Expeditionary Group that runs the base. "But that's reduced, too," he said. "Most of the large loads we handle now come by truck."

Shortly after the airlift subsided, the Air Force did a complete turnaround. Its focus changed from the massive airlift effort to making life better for troops.

"This is one of the best deployed bases I've seen," said Chief Master Sgt. Tom Russell, while on a summer tour. More change is coming. "Each new group has its own needs, ideas and requests. They'll continue to make this place better."

What can troops expect?

A lot more than they thought, said Staff Sgt. Jim Quinn, a services specialist who kept morale, welfare and recreation programs, and the dining facilities running when he was there. He thought he'd find a "big

mud hole." But this place is 10 times better than what people say. And a helluva lot better than the desert," he said.

Weather forecaster Airman 1st Class Jamie Hardin thought she was going to live in a tent. "So the 'hooches' were a good surprise. That makes life a lot easier."

The hooches are 12 wooden "SEA" huts where airmen live. Divided into rooms, each has "the most comfortable beds we could find," the chief said. And they have a refrigerator, microwave oven, television with cable programming, radio, videocassette recorder, iron and ironing board.

The compound also has the Rock City Café and a chapel, library, sports equipment outlet, gym and shoppette. Movies are free for checkout. Education courses are also available.

But what's best about Tuzla is the food, Quinn said. The contractor-run dining facilities are a big hit with the troops. Open 24 hours, they have a bigger selection than Denny's.

"And in summer, we have a free 'hump day Wednesday' barbeque," Quinn said.

Many things have changed even since her last deployment to Tuzla a year ago, said Capt. Kristine Vier, an intelligence officer. "This place has grown by leaps and bounds."

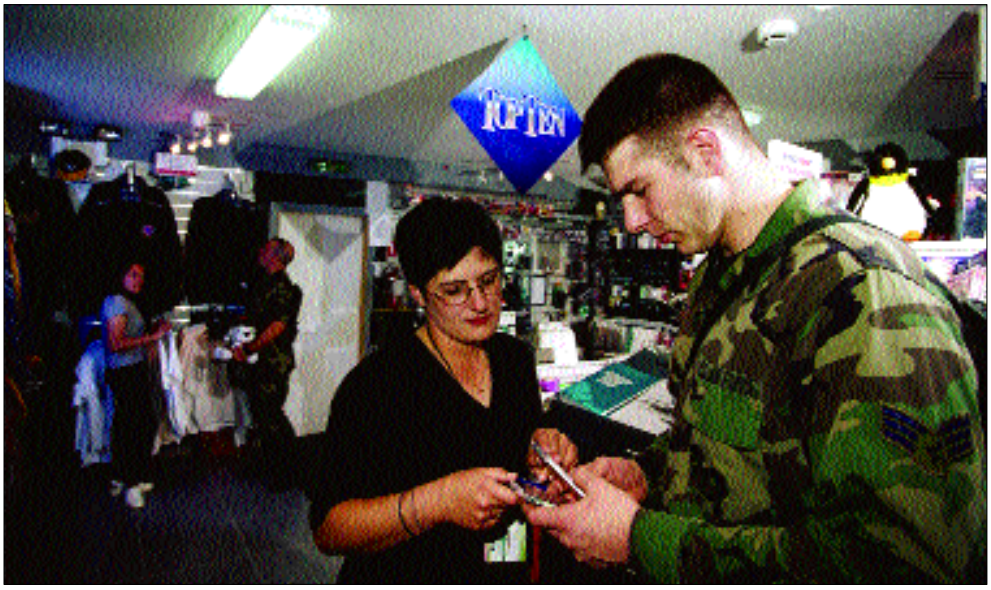
And upgrades will continue as long as there are airmen at the base, Schell said.

But the Air Force will cut the number of troops, he said. Once there were some 500 airmen. Now approximately 135 remain. The goal is to cut to 125 troops this year and then to 100.

The aim is to whittle the number down to only those needed to maintain command and control and the critical skills, he said. But the base is the only one in the area that can handle strategic airlift. So the Air Force mission is too important for a total pullout.

"We're the key supply line to the peacekeepers," Schell said.

The Rendez-Vous Cafe, a coffee bar, is a big hit with airmen and soldiers. A short distance from the well-stocked shopping exchange, its sidewalk tables are always full.



Amela Huseinagic enjoys assisting customers, like Senior Airman Zack Wakefield, at the shopping exchange.

Airmen take to the basketball court which was erected so troops could have some fun and get exercise.

KEEN SWORD

U.S. AND JAPAN TRAIN TOGETHER

Story and photos by Cpl. Kurt Fredrickson

Two nations, more than 400 people and several aircraft and boats, took part in Keen Sword 2001, the largest, non-combatant evacuation and search and rescue exercise in the history of the United States and Japanese military cooperative training.

These exercises are done to practice evacuating and rescuing non-combatants [non-military personnel] from dangerous situations, as a result of a war or major earthquake, and taking them to positions of greater safety.

The exercise was broken into NEO and SAR scenarios which took place recently throughout Japan.

The event took six months of preparation and lasted only five hours, but the reaction from officials came down to one word, "incredible".

"It was incredible, from start to finish," said Master Sgt. Dean Jordan, subject matter expert working on the evacuation side of the exercise from 3rd Force Service Support Group Okinawa. Things went very well from the first six months of planning, all in conjunction with another nation.

"The operation was to improve joint working relationships between ourselves and our Japanese counterparts," said Capt. Clifton Turner, the executive officer for Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni Combat Service Support Detachment 36. "We gained a greater appreciation for their structure and how they operate."

There were several groups involved in the exercise. American services consisting of Marines, sailors, airmen and coast guard sailors worked alongside the Japanese Ground, Air and Maritime Self Defense Forces to accomplish the missions.

"The joint aspect of it was learning how the Japanese conduct NEOs [evacuation exercises], and they were observing how we conduct NEOs," said Master Sgt. William Peden, MCAS Iwakuni CSSD-36 operations officer.

The exercise was a training exercise for large groups of civilians and military, but it was also a chance for individuals to understand how their job is a key component of a NEO.

To be swiftly evacuated, non-combatants must present proof of citizenship or resident status in Japan, or must have ties to the United States. A passport, military or U.S. Government identification, or birth certificate are just a few forms of identification that would suffice.

"We have to take everybody's information and ensure everything is moving smoothly so if anything happens on the bird we have their information," said Lance Cpl. Edward Moss, MCAS Iwakuni CSSD-36 embarkation clerk. "It was different and gives us experience working with the Japanese."

The operation drew individuals from various job sections and put them into an evacuation environment. According to Moss, a native of Fredericksburg, Va., it got him out of the office and into a new atmosphere where he could still do his job.

The MCAS Iwakuni processing area was divided into two areas, a Japanese side and American side. Japanese and American embarkation personnel processed a mix of both American and Japanese non-combatants. Japanese non-combatants had a card in English that eased the embarkation personnel with the collection of vital information. Individuals processed aboard MCAS Iwakuni were formed into groups every 20 minutes and escorted onto the flight line where they loaded onto a Japanese C-130, one C-1 and three HH-47 helicopters and a U.S. Air Force C-130. After departure each aircraft flew to Tsuiki JASDF base, then returned to Iwakuni after a short layover.

The search and rescue portion of the exercise at MCAS Iwakuni lasted two days, and provided SAR personnel from Japanese and American services a more realistic scenario than normal training. "This is the closest we can get to a real

Lance Cpl. Les Begin, Iwakuni SAR rescue swimmer, cracks a sea dye marker which immediately turned the ocean around them bright green.

rescue situation," said Lance Cpl. Les Begin, MCAS Iwakuni SAR rescue swimmer. The day began early with sailors from the MCAS Iwakuni Boathouse taking simulated survivors, played by Iwakuni SAR and U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmers, approximately 20 miles into the inland sea. Air Force swimmers were also dropped off by a helicopter to be located and retrieved by a Japanese Search and Rescue helicopter.

Keen Sword Exercise participants throughout Japan received commands from the Bilateral Rescue Coordination Center in Tokyo, that relayed all five of the search and rescue scenarios to SAR units participating over the three-day period.

Once on site just off shore from Iwakuni, swimmers waited until the call came that aircraft were on their way and then entered the water. Begin cracked a dye marker which immediately turned the ocean around them bright neon green.

Normally Iwakuni SAR training is conducted close to station without the aid of emergency location devices such as dye. The swimmers, to further expand on the scenario of a pilot ejecting over water, also deployed life rafts.

"For the Coast Guard it's an unusual opportunity," said Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Donald Murray, aviation survival technician from Coast Guard Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii. "It's not that often we get to train with other services."

Staff Sgt. James Sweeny holds Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Donald Murray, an aviation survival technician, as they are hoisted out of the sea and into the hovering Iwakuni SAR helicopter.

Petty Officer 1st Class Darrell Timpa, search and r"""""escue corpsman, shields the face of Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Donald Murray, aviation survival technician from the rotor wash of the helicopter after arriving on station.

An Air Force HH-60G soon picked up Begin, and Murray was hoisted into the Iwakuni Search and Rescue helicopter.

"What makes this training different and great is we get to learn each others way of doing things," Murray said. "They do things a lot faster in the Air Force, and the Marines and Navy do the same as the Coast Guard to a certain point."

While Murray was in the water, the Coast Guard C-130 was in the sky high above monitoring the player's movements.

"We provided search and rescue cover as a safety aircraft, and acted as a communication relay should an actual emergency arise," said Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Scott Loska, load and drop master.

The Japanese launched at the same time from MCAS Iwakuni to another simulated accident site to conduct similar SAR training and retrieved one Air Force swimmer.

"This is an experience that we could seldom have," said Maj. Akihiko Ozahara, Hyakuri Air Rescue Squadron flight safety officer, a member of the Japanese self defense forces. The exercise was a chance to demonstrate cooperation and communication between American and Japanese forces, and also between the Japanese services.

"Improving communications is the underlying goal of the entire exercise," said Capt. Chad Blair, MCAS Iwakuni Station Operation Management Division maintenance officer.

The NEO and SAR training was more than a faceless group carrying out a plan for practice. It brought together individuals with similar jobs, from different services, and nations, giving them the chance to talk with each other about how they conduct business.

"It was face to face work with the different services," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Ben Harris, para-rescueman from Kadena Air Force Base, Japan. "It makes it easier to come together on an actual mission rather than having to work the little things out then and there."

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